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## For Whom the Bells Toll: A Polyphonic Fragment in Thomas Mann's *Der Erwählte*

Although many studies have been devoted to the role of music in the works of Thomas Mann, very little attention has been paid to this aspect in his novel *Der Erwählte*. This novel presents two main ideas, an ethical and an aesthetic one, which are connected with each other and with Mann's critical attitude towards music, a criticism which he expressed in most of his works. Nevertheless, many remarks by Mann prove that he consciously strove for musicality in his writings, especially through textual stratification. The analysis of the subtexts of a fragment from *Der Erwählte* in this study serves to substantiate the argument that the fragment might be called 'polyphonic': the subtexts sound together simultaneously with the 'supratext', yet possess an identity of their own and form a harmonious entity. Mann's ambiguous attitude towards music presented him with problems. The final discussion in this study deals with his attempts to resolve this dilemma.

Though critical of the art of music, Thomas Mann often expressed his intention to write musicalized texts, which he sometimes called his 'Lieder' or 'Partituren'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, many studies have been devoted to musicality and the functions of music in his work.<sup>2</sup> It is remarkable, then, that very little attention has been paid to this aspect of his last novel, *Der Erwählte*. In this study I shall analyze and discuss the polyphony in a fragment of Mann's *Erwählte*, ending with a brief reflection on the paradox in Mann's thoughts on music and his musical style of writing.

### *Doktor Faustus* and *Der Erwählte*: Themes and Motives

Music in *Der Erwählte*, a story dealing with the miraculous election of a fictitious Pope Gregorius, admittedly plays a less striking role than in the preceding novel, *Doktor Faustus*, in which the protagonist is a composer and where music is thematized and repeatedly discussed.<sup>3</sup> We should nevertheless be alert to the part which music plays in Mann's *Der Erwählte*, for this novel can be (and has been) conceived as a sequel to his *Doktor Faustus*. Their unity of ideas alone makes this clear. I shall briefly examine these ideas with a view to the concluding discussion of Mann's ambivalent attitude towards music.

Both the storyteller of the Gregorius novel, a modest Irish monk, and the narrator of the Faust novel, a classicist, present themselves as having a humanist orientation. The two narrators treat their material with sympathy, but also with deep concern and critically. Although the Gregorius novel deals with incest and the Faust novel with the

- 1 Thomas Mann, 'Joseph und seine Brüder: Ein Vortrag', in: Mann, *Rede und Antwort*, 112. Mann, 'Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus', in: *Ibid.*, 155, 156. References to quotations from Mann's texts refer to Thomas Mann, *Gesammelte Werke in Einzelbände*, ed. Peter de Mendelssohn, Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 1980-1986.
- 2 An early example is: M. Schochow, 'Der musikalische Aufbau in Thomas Manns Novelle "Tonio Kröger"', *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Bildung* 4 (1928), 244-253. One of the most important publications from the twenty-first century is: Hans R. Vaget: *Seelenzauber. Thomas und die Musik*, Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 2006, which contains a collection of Vaget's articles written during the last decades.
- 3 *Der Erwählte* retells the medieval legend of the incestuous son of a noble twin brother and sister, who is raised as a foundling on a Norman island, later more or less unknowingly marries his mother, submits to heavy penitence for this double incest and becomes a very merciful Pope in Rome.

crime of National Socialism and the Second World War, the source of both crimes (like the actions of many other protagonists in Mann's fiction) is located in the sin of *superbia* – pride, interiorisation (*Verinnerlichung*) or elitism – and in a romantic sympathy with death and past. In *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, written during the First World War as a defence of German culture and referred to by Mann himself as a feat of arms, he still complied with this sympathy with death and past.<sup>4</sup> Yet, later articles and his fiction clarify that Mann actually considered this enchanting sympathy also to be a precarious one. He consequently associated it with a rejection of life and the future, and with an elitist distancing of 'the other', which are unmasked as *superbia*. In *Doktor Faustus* this arrogance takes the form of preoccupation with the devil and madness: 'Denn lange schon ... war meine Seel in Hochmut und Stolz zu dem Satan unterwegs gewesen ...' (667). In *Der Erwählte*, arrogance is the cause of double incest. The brother and the sister admit to each other: 'Hochmut aber, du Ärmste, Liebste, war unsre Sünde, und daß wir in aller Welt von niemand anderm wissen wollten als von uns besonderen Kindern' (31).<sup>5</sup> Gregorius's mother also confesses that 'unwissentlich-wissend habe sie das eigene Kind zum Manne genommen, weil es der einzig Ebenbürtige wieder gewesen' (254). Gregorius himself admits that he, deep down, 'ebenfalls recht gut wußte, daß es seine Mutter war, die er liebte' (255). At the end of both stories, speculation about God's forgiveness without penitence beforehand is rejected as diabolic. In both novels *superbia*, penitence and trust in divine mercy constitute the central themes.

For several reasons, the author could not permit himself to grant this mercy in *Doktor Faustus*. Apart from the fact that the pre-text, the *Historia von D. Johann Fausten*,<sup>6</sup> did not offer absolution, the manifestation of sin in the novel (National Socialism) was historical reality and much too serious to be forgiven. The author – a German, who at the time and place where he worked on it (during the Second World War in the USA) was considered to be the cultural representative of Germany and who called the Faust novel his 'life confession' – felt so much involved with his country that mercy would seem to be a form of self-absolution. *Der Erwählte*, on the other hand, deals with a relatively innocent form of sin and is enacted in a local, predominantly fictitious and historically unspecified medieval setting. At the end of the story the sinners must be absolved of their transgressions, because, for one, Mann's model text, the poem *Gregorius der gute Sünder* by the medieval poet Hartmann von Aue, had this outcome, but above all because (already in Hartmann's version) the protagonists impose severe punishments on themselves and subsequently opt for the future and for a compassionate life.

In *Doktor Faustus* pride not only manifested itself in a closed political system, but also in that art which is 'closed', that is, bound to a high degree by rules, namely the art of music, which, according to Mann, is an essentially romantic art. The storyteller presents it explicitly as the dangerously enchanting opposite to prose, which for him is a free, clear and critical medium (16, 17). So it is not at all far-fetched to suppose that the opposition of music and prose will appear in one form or another also in *Der Erwählte*, as indeed happens. The tone in which the narrator makes several comments about music and musicians – calling the latter 'dies Volk' (15) – is rather derogatory. In this novel it is, however, not so much music in the restricted sense that steps into the ring against prose, but rather poetry. As early as 1916-1918, in *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, Mann had discussed both music and poetry as being strictly bounded forms of art in which sound

4 Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, 424. See also, for instance, Vaegt, *Seelenzauber*, 203-237.

5 Incest, for Mann a mythological concept, which occurred amongst those in high positions, gods and princes, who have no equals, in his works acquires the meaning of an arrogant choice in favour of oneself. In *Der Erwählte*, Mann labels incest between a mother and son as 'zurück zeugen' (161). Incest between a brother and sister is an obstacle to progress too.

6 Written by an anonymous German author and published in 1587 by Johann Spies in Frankfurt/M.

blurs the content and which do not belong to the humanistic realm (49,50).<sup>7</sup> Some thirty years later, in *Doktor Faustus*, not only music but also archaisms, speech deficiencies and language games are associated with the diabolic. In *Der Erwählte*, it is predominantly poetry that is the focus of criticism. Poetry is rejected explicitly by the narrator already in the first chapter (13), and implicitly by the *dramatis personae*: as soon as they compromise truth or adopt an attitude of arrogance, they surreptitiously begin talking metrically and in rhyming verse, and sometimes in a mixture of languages.<sup>8</sup> One of them admits his own 'reimen und lügen' or calls it 'Singen' (128,129).

Yet, in *Der Erwählte* also music itself plays a quantitatively small but significant role. First and most extensively, music appears at the most prominent place, namely at the very beginning of the novel. The narrator starts his frame tale with the ceremonious ringing of nearly a hundred Roman church bells. Proud of his power as a storyteller, he makes them ring of their own accord, without any human intervention. With this miraculous ringing, he anticipates the festive entry of the new Pope into Rome, which takes place near the end of the story. There the narrator briefly recalls the mysterious ringing, not even spending the fifty words that Hartmann von Aue had used for his description of it. However, in this second description Mann criticizes the ringing ironically as unhealthy and bombastic, and as an affliction to the ear. The depiction at the beginning, which Mann added to Hartmann's original tale, takes up between 500-600 words. It describes music; the sound of the bells is a cacophony, which the narrator describes with a metaphor from language, calling it a 'Babylonisches Durcheinander', without 'Zeitmaß' or 'Einklang' (7). Moreover he does so in a musical-poetical way, using sonorous foreign words and names, inversion, assonance, alliteration, repetition, and other sound effects.

Wer läutet?

Glockenschall, Glockenschwall supra urbem, über der ganzen Stadt, in ihren von Klang überfüllten Lüften! Glocken, Glocken, sie schwingen und schaukeln, wogen und wiegen ausholend an ihren Balken, in ihren Stühlen, hundertstimmig, in babylonischem Durcheinander. Schwer und geschwind, brummend und bimmelnd, – da ist nicht Zeitmaß noch Einklang, sie reden auf einmal und alle einander ins Wort, ins Wort auch sich selber: andröhnen die Klöppel und lassen nicht Zeit dem erregten Metall, daß es ausdröhne, da dröhnen sie pendelnd an am anderen Rande, ins eigene Gedröhne, also daß, wenn's nocht hallt 'In te Domine speravi', so hallt es auch schon 'Beati quorum tecta sunt peccata', hinein aber klingelt es hell von kleineren Stätten, als rühre der Meßbub das Wandlungsglöcklein.

Von den Höhen läutet es und aus der Tiefe, von den sieben erzeiligen Orten der Wallfahrt und allen Pfarrkirchen der sieben Sprengel zu Seiten des zweimal gebogenen Tibers. Vom Aventin läutet's, von den Heiligtümern des Palatin und von Sankt Johannes im Lateran, es läutet über dem Grabe dessen, der die Schlüssel führt, im Vatikanischen Hügel, von Sankta Maria Maggiore, in Foro, in Domnica, in Cosmedin und in Trastevere, von Ara Celi, Sankt Paulus außer der Mauer, Sankt Peter in Banden und vom Haus zum hochheiligen Kreuz in Jerusalem. Aber von den Kapellen der Friedhöfe, den Dächern der Saalkirchen und Oratorien in den Gassen läutet es auch. Wer nennt die Namen und weiß die Titel? Wie es tönt, wenn der Wind, wenn der Sturm gar wühlt in den Saiten der Äolshar-

- 7 In many other texts, Mann also relates semantic indeterminacy or emptiness to music. In *Der alte Fontane*, he calls Theodor Fontane a 'singer' for a lack of content in some of his novels. (*Leiden und Größe der Meister*, 602.) In *Der Erwählte*, the uncivilized and superstitious fishermen from the fictitious island Sankt Dunstan speak a dialect that Mann composed from English and North German slang, for which they are ridiculed and admonished to tell the truth: 'Richtig reden, das muß man nicht. Aber die Wahrheit sagen, das muß man' (60).
- 8 The German protagonist in Mann's *Der Zauberberg* notices: 'Parler français, c'est parler sans parler, en quelque manière ...' (473).

fe und gänzlich die Klangwelt aufgeweckt ist, was weit voneinander und nahe beisammen, in schwirrender Allharmonie: so, doch ins Erzene übersetzt, geht es zu in den berstenden Lüften, da alles läutet zu großem Fest und erhabenem Einzug.

Wer läutet die Glocken? Die Glöckner nicht. Die sind auf die Straße gelaufen wie alles Volk, da es so ungeheuerlich läutet. Überzeugt euch: die Glockenstuben sind leer. Schlaff hängen die Seile, und dennoch wogen die Glocken, dröhnen die Klöppel. ... Wer also läutet die Glocken Roms? – *Der Geist der Erzählung*. – ... Er ist luftig, körperlos, allgegenwärtig, nicht unterworfen dem Unterschiede von Hier und Dort. Er ist es, der spricht: "alle Glocken läuteten", und folglich ist er's, der sie läutet.

Mann's works reveal many links, more or less hidden, to his own writings and those by others (including myths and mythological motifs), so that each novel 'seine Motive, Erinnerungen, Anspielungen, wie seine Sprachlaute, aus vielen Sphären borgt.'<sup>9</sup> The bell fragment in *Der Erwählte* does so most succinctly: it contains at least six subtextual 'voices' that are highly illustrative of Mann's ambivalence with respect to music. Precisely because these texts and passages by others are interconnected, the six references can only be understood (and their subtextual presence posited) after considering their context in more detail.

### The First Voice: Two Psalms

Soon after the opening sentence, the bells ring out half of two titles of psalms over the city: 'In te Domine speravi; [non confundar in aeternum]' ('In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; [let me never be ashamed]') is the beginning of Psalm 31, 'Beati [quorum remissae sunt iniquitates et] quorum tecta sunt peccata' ('Blessed is he [whose transgression is forgiven,] whose sin is covered'), that of Psalm 32.<sup>10</sup> It is clear that Mann, known for and well-seasoned in his 'Wagnerian' motif technique, did not try to evoke the psalm melodies, but the texts themselves. Their content clarifies that Mann's evocations refer to the content of the novel. Psalm 31 calls forth one of its main themes: it laments the sin of *superbia* and at the end predicts God's punishment of the proud and His mercy on the righteous. In the novel, the most explicit reference to the blessings of mercy appears in the short epilogue, where the narrator points to it, calling it devilish to trust on mercy without penance (260). Psalm 32 is called 'the joy of forgiveness' and is devoted not only to the hope for mercy – [32:10] 'But he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about' – but also to the second theme in the novel, the idea that deceit and concealment of sin lead to misery, while honest, explicit confession leads to forgiveness:

[32:3] When I kept silent, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. [32:5] I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.

Both the narrator and his personae occasionally draw attention to the necessity for sincerity and clear statements. Two of the most striking illustrations of evocations of these psalm texts come from the mouth of Gregorius, admonishing his wife after they have discovered that she is at the same time his mother:

Nicht umsonst habe ich divinitatem ernstlich betrieben. ... Ich lernte, daß Er wahre Reue als Buße annimmt für alle Sünden (179).

9 Mann, 'Joseph und seine Brüder', 112. In 'Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus' he mentions his 'Bereitschaft zur Aneignung dessen, was ich als mein Eigenes empfinde, was zu mir, das heißt zur 'Sache' gehört.' Ibid., 159.

10 Numbering according to the Lutheran version. Translations from the Authorized King James Version.

And:

Wir sollen ausdrücklich sprechen und die Dinge bei Namen nennen zu unsrer Kasteiung.  
Denn die Wahrheit sagen, das ist Kasteiung (177).

So both psalms, like the novel pointing to clear articulation and mercy, evoke the fragments of themes that before the beginning of an opera flutter out of the orchestra pit or are audible in the overture, preparing the connoisseur for the complete melodies that will be heard during the performance itself.

### The Second Voice: Richard Wagner

In a novel which is set in the Middle Ages, Richard Wagner's art is literally 'Zukunftsmusik'. However, indirectly he is present, as in most other works by Mann. In his oeuvre Wagner's leitmotif technique is used as an epic device: by connecting events the leitmotif is able to establish links at a great distance and thus to enhance the conception of time, bringing about a perception of simultaneity.<sup>11</sup> Mann also frequently made explicit references to Wagner's texts. For example, in *Der Erwählte* the composer's voice is heard in the chapter 'Die Fischer von Sankt Dunstan', when the abbot of the monastery on the Irish island, facing stormy weather on the seaside, nervously waits for the fishermen's safe return. Although determined to greet them in a dignified manner, the excited abbot cannot prevent himself hailing them with a 'Hallo Hoihe' in his relief at their safe arrival (72). Obviously Mann alludes to the greeting 'Hoiho' (later repeated as 'Hoiho hoihe') by Hagen in *Götterdämmerung* as he, standing at the bank of the river Rhine, welcomes the 'Gibichsmannen' arriving in their boat. The abbot's Wagnerian salute functions as a motif that points back to the Wagner scene. Through the abbot's call, it prepares the reader – in a veiled, indirect form and as such musically – for a fact that is still unknown, even to the abbot himself. The abbot, after all, does not know yet that the fishermen, like the 'Gibichsmannen' who bring Siegfried, come sailing up with the protagonist Gregorius, who like Siegfried is the son of a twin brother and sister. Thus the salute is an object as well as a subject of narration. The complexity of the scene exemplifies the influence of Wagner's technique in Mann's work. Of course, the 'undisciplined' greeting of the abbot, who is overwhelmed by his feelings, also reflects Mann's ambivalence towards Wagner's intoxicating art which, in the author's eyes, demonstrates perfectly that music, more than any other art, does not so much intend to convince rationally as rather to overwhelm and dominate the listener's self-control.

In the bell-ringing passage, the narrator perhaps alludes to the effect of simultaneity of Wagnerian leitmotifs with his reference to the Babylonian confusion and with the phrase 'sie reden auf einmal und alle einander ins Wort, ins Wort auch sich selber'. Be that as it may, in the bell-ringing fragment the narrator anticipates the abbot's 'Wagnerizing': he refers to Wagner's famous alliteration technique in his description of the bells, which 'schwingen und schaukeln, wogen und wiegen', 'schwer und geschwind, brummend und bimmelnd' (7). Later in the novel, the ringing is criticized as 'heilige Heimsuchung' (234).

Mann not only seems to render ironic the 'Schwulstige und Barocke, auch Kindliche', 'großartige und selbtherrliche Unberufenheit' of Wagner's language.<sup>12</sup> The sound characterizations indirectly also refer to the concealed language of poetry in general, which, like other sound effects such as dialects, words from other languages etc., is criticized explicitly by the narrator shortly afterwards in the same first chapter.

11 Vaget, 'Thomas Mann und Wagner: Zur Funktion des Leitmotivs in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* und *Buddenbrooks*', in: Steven P. Scher (ed.), *Literatur und Musik: Ein Handbuch zur Theorie und Praxis eines komparatistischen Grenzgebietes*, Berlin: Erich Schmidt-Verlag, 1984, 326-347.

12 Mann, 'Leiden und Größe Richard Wagners', in: Mann, *Leiden und Größe der Meister*, 730.

### The Third and Fourth Voices: Hans Pfitzner and Thomas Mann Himself

Wagner was also Hans Pfitzner's guide. In 1918, in *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, Mann wrote of Pfitzner's most famous work, his opera *Palestrina*: 'Man kennt die Meisterschule, in der das erlernt wurde. Das seelisch Moderne, alles Raffinement dieses Vorhalt-Geschiebes ...'<sup>13</sup> In this opera, Luigi da Palestrina composes his *Missae Papae Marcelli* in a trance that lasts for a night. He manages to do this thanks to inspiration from the past, namely from his deceased wife and predecessors. With this mass, born out of a miraculous poetic inspiration, Pfitzner's Palestrina teaches the 'expressionists' of the Florentine Camerata, with their new, clear articulation of language in music, a lesson.<sup>14</sup> Here Pfitzner mirrors his own late-romantic position relative to expressionists such as Schönberg and futurists such as Busoni, his 'impotent contemporaries', as he called them.

Mann attended the first performances of *Palestrina* in 1917. He was enthusiastic about the highly German atmosphere, the 'Dürerisch-Faustischen Wesenszüge' and the romantic 'Sympathie mit dem Tode' and longing for the past, as is apparent, for instance, in Palestrina's trance-like creativity. It would be a misunderstanding, though, to think that Mann himself tried to write in a trance. On the contrary, he worked at set hours and with tenacity, that is, in accordance with a disciplined work ethic.<sup>15</sup> His creations are the result not only of inspiration, but also of reflection, calculation and highly sophisticated constructions. Also Pfitzner must have justified the trance mainly for ideological reasons. His quotes in the opera from the historical *Missa Papae Marcelli* bear witness to a very deliberate montage and it would have been impossible to write them in a trance.<sup>16</sup> What interested Mann about the creative trance was probably not so much the correctness of Pfitzner's theory as, rather, the symbolic value of the state of mind praised by Pfitzner. Since consciousness, responsibility, and criticism are much diminished in a state of creative trance, it formed part of his complex of ideas on romanticism.<sup>17</sup> Mann voiced his praise immediately in his *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*.<sup>18</sup> In this essay, he still tried to uphold his nationalistic conservative ideas, although, considering the simultaneous genesis of *Der Zauberberg*, one suspects that at the time he already knew better. Nonetheless, the romantic ideology expressed in *Palestrina* served to confirm these ideas. From an aesthetic perspective, Mann was impressed above all by the powerful ringing of bells in Pfitzner's opera, which he described at some length and with much affection.

... und da, wahrhaftig, kommt auch das vergessene Leiern von gesternabend wieder in Gang, es gleicht einem Läuten, ja das sind Glocken, die Morgenglocken von Rom, nicht wirkliche Glocken, nur nachgeahmt vom Orchester, doch so, wie hundertfach schwingendes, tönendes, dröhnendes Kirchenglockenerzgetöse überhaupt noch niemals künstlerisch nachgeahmt wurde, – ein kolossales Schaukeln von abenteuerlich harmonisierten Sekunden, worin, wie in dem vom Gehör nicht zu bewältigenden Tosen eines Wasserfalls, sämtliche Tonhöhen und Schwingungsarten, Donnern, Brummen, und Schmettern mit höchst-

13 Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, 408.

14 Pfitzner did not bother about historical exactness. In reality, the mass in question was written some time before the emergence of the Florentines.

15 This tenacity is one of the similarities between Mann and Gregorius, whose 'festhaltender Hand' may be called one of the main motifs in the novel. Mann confirms this resemblance in his letter of 28 April 1952 to Ferdinand Lion. See *Thomas Mann: Briefe III*, ed. Erika Mann, Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 1979, 251.

16 Gundula Bergsten draws attention to this contradiction between Pfitzner's montage and his theory of creation. Bergsten, *Thomas Manns Doktor Faustus: Untersuchungen zu den Quellen und zur Struktur des Romans*, Lund: Svenska Bokförlaget, 1963, 135ff. I suppose Pfitzner could have presented a counterargument, namely that, just like his protagonist, a dead predecessor – the historical Palestrina – had inspired him.

17 The ideas are elaborated, for instance, in *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*.

18 *Ibid.*, 407-426.

tem Streichergefistel sich mischen, ganz so, wie es ist, wenn hundertfaches Glockengedröhn die Gesamtatmosphäre in Vibration versetzt zu haben und das Himmelsgewölbe sprengen zu wollen scheint. Es ist ein ungeheurer Effekt!<sup>19</sup>

In the forties, Pfitzner tried (in vain) to take advantage of National Socialism. However, already in the thirties, after having been publicly attacked by the composer for his criticism of Wagner, Mann acknowledged the dangerous potential of Pfitzner's – and of his own – romantic convictions.<sup>20</sup> He distanced himself from Pfitzner. Only at the end of Mann's life does Pfitzner, nameless and concealed, reappear in his work, in *Doktor Faustus*, namely, as Vaget has pointed out, as a national-socialist, perverted Wagnerian.<sup>21</sup> Especially Pfitzner's romantic theory of inspiration, which the composer defended in his essays and his *Palestrina*, plays an important, negative role in the Faust novel. If we compare the description in the *Betrachtungen* of the ringing in *Palestrina* to the bell passage in *Der Erwählte*, written some 35 years later, it is immediately obvious that this is a paraphrase.<sup>22</sup> However, it is a paraphrase in which Mann now views with irony Pfitzner's bombastic bell-ringing – and therewith his own romanticism in the period around the First World War. With the overwhelming and resonant ringing in his novel, he bids farewell both to his own praise in *Betrachtungen* and to Pfitzner's romantic, amply orchestrated score, and, with it, to romantic music itself.

### The Fifth Voice: Gerhart Hauptmann

In 1918, shortly after had he sung the praises of Hans Pfitzner's bells, Mann hit on another instance of ringing bells, namely in a recent novella by Gerhart Hauptmann, *Der Ketzer von Soana*. This novella deals with a priest who wishes to win a wild and heathen child of nature for Christendom but, after a long inner struggle, gives himself over to the girl and the forces of nature. The surrender takes place in natural surroundings, accompanied by the sound of organs, harps, 'harmonies' and church bells. With Pfitzner's bells still ringing in his ears, Mann must have been struck by this evocation of music, albeit in a negative way.

To be clear, aesthetically he would have been impressed by Hauptmann's ringing for its theatrical effect, caused by the connotation of Christian authority. For instance, he appears enthusiastic about 'die finster-melodramatische Poesie, die waltet, als in [Hauptmann's drama] den Ratten Bruno Mechelke, beim Geläut der Kirchenglocken, seinen Mord berichtet ...'.<sup>23</sup> However, in *Der Ketzer* Hauptmann presents the triumph of nature over morality, accompanied by music, as a liberation, which definitely was not to Mann's liking. In Mann's fiction, Dionysian inebriation and surrender, whether caused by nature or by music, always result in fatal consequences (if the surrender itself is not already considered fatal) and so always provoke critical treatment. About *Der Ketzer* he writes:

19 Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, 411.

20 Pfitzner was one of the signatories of the *Protest der Richard-Wagner-Stadt München*, a reaction in 1933 to Mann's lecture 'Leiden und Größe Richard Wagners', in which the author not just admires Wagner's genius, but also expresses his ethical and aesthetical doubts about the great composer. Mann reacted to the *Protest* with a short *Erwiderung*, with an *Antwort an Hans Pfitzner* and with his emigration.

21 H. Vaget, 'Salome und Palestrina als historischen Chiffren: Zur musikgeschichtlichen Codierung in Thomas Manns *Doktor Faustus*', in: Heinz Gockel, Michael Neumann, Ruprecht Wimmer (eds), *Wagner – Nietzsche – Thomas Mann: Festschrift für Eckhard Hefrich*, Frankfurt/M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1993, 76ff.

22 The first who pointed to the reference were Erika Mann in 'Wer Läutet?', in: J. Hellmut Freund, Gerda Niedieck (eds), *Almanach. Das achtzigste Jahr*, Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 1966, 48-55, and Gerhard Loose, 'Glocken über Rom', *Modern Language Notes* 74/7, 1975, 633-636.

23 'Gerhart Hauptmann', in: Mann, *Leiden und Größe der Meister*, 639.



Eine schöne Aussicht hat man ja darin; aber um das Seelische, Geistige, steht es recht dürftig. Und dem sehr christlichen Dichter Hauptmann steht es gar nicht an, mit dem Christentum so 'humoristisch' umzugehen.<sup>24</sup>

How one should deal with Christianity Mann demonstrates in *Der Erwählte* (applying a very humoristic style). In this novel, inebriation and nature's moral indifference are mocked, tribute is paid to discipline, and the sin of surrendering to nature is tolerated only if this sin is atoned for and replaced by control and a conscious community spirit. Hauptmann's attitude during the Nazi regime proved Mann's negative opinion to be right: like Pfitzner, Hauptmann stayed in Germany and accommodated the regime. *Der Erwählte* could have offered Mann the opportunity to attack Hauptmann's immoral bells. These had sounded like

... Glocken, Glocken, Geläut von Glocken, von Hochzeitsglocken, kleinen und großen, tiefen und hohen, gewaltigen und zarten, verbreiteten eine erdrückend-selige Feierlichkeit durch den Weltenraum.<sup>25</sup>

In contrast to the description of Pfitzner's bells in the *Betrachtungen*, in *Der Erwählte* Hauptmann's bells can be heard immediately in the second line: 'Glocken, Glocken'. Contrasts, such as Hauptmann's 'kleinen und großen, tiefen und hohen, gewaltigen und zarten', combined with the reference to Wagner's alliterations, sound here as 'schwer und geschwind, brummend und bimmelnd' and 'von den Höhen ... und aus der Tiefe'. Later in the novel, in Mann's brief second description of the ringing, an oxymoron comparable with Hauptmann's 'erdrückend-selige', is also given a place. In this case, the ringing is referred to as a 'hehre Plage' and 'heilige Heimsuchung und Kalamität' (235). Mann often described the way Hauptmann spoke – without finishing his sentences and unarticulated. He portrayed him in this way in 1923 as Mynheer Peepkorn in *Der Zauberberg*. In *Der Erwählte* Hauptmann's questionable lack of articulation and his belief in morally indifferent nature and music are probably held up to scorn once again.

### The Sixth Voice: Saint Dunstan

In order to evoke sound, Mann often resorted to acoustic parallels in his works. In the *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* he compared Pfitzner's boisterous bells with a waterfall. In *Der Erwählte* the waterfall is replaced by an Aeolian or wind harp. The sound of an Aeolian harp, however, is anything but dominant. It is a string instrument that was suspended in a window or sometimes in abandoned ruins so that the wind could blow through the strings to produce lamenting tones. So, like the function of the psalm titles, the function of Mann's harp cannot be one that evokes a sound. Various explanations for his comparison are conceivable. The most plausible one, however, is that the instrument provides a reference to the first historical owner and builder of the wind harp, the holy Dunstan, Bishop of Canterbury in the tenth century. In *Der Erwählte*, the Aeolian harp would indeed not be the only reference to the Bishop. According to Mann, the imaginary island on which the protagonist grows up as a foundling is called Sankt Dunstan. The place and its inhabitants are described as not affected by world events, isolated and living in backwardness, with abominable customs and a deplorable, incomprehensible dialect. The reader could interpret this as a variation on Mann's view of Germany, with its barbaric nationalism, its political isolation and its dangerous poetical attitude, as described in *Doktor Faustus*.

24 23 May 1918 to Philipp Witkop, in: Mann, *Briefe I*, 144 (see note 16); the underlining is Mann's. See also 4 October 1919 to Josef Ponten, in *Ibid.*, 170.

25 Gerhart Hauptmann, *Der Ketzer von Soana*, Frankfurt/M, Berlin: Ullstein, 1996, 114.

It seems that the historical Saint Dunstan was not free from poetic arrogance. He was accused of sorcery, perhaps because he would not hear of it that the wind caused the harp to sound and claimed that he himself possessed the power to make the instrument sound at a distance. This reminds us of the narrator in *Der Erwählte*, who in his first description takes pride in having the bells ring of their own accord and in his second description attributes this to an over-emotional reaction of heaven (235); it also recalls Pfitzner's (according to Mann, questionable) romantic inspiration theory. Nineteenth-century poets regarded the wind harp as a symbol of the divine origin of poetical inspiration. We may therefore explain the wind harp in the bell-ringing passage as a reference to reprehensible poetry and pride, and, indirectly, as a plea for clear utterance and an open mind.

Summarizing the six 'voices' – the psalms, Wagner's art, Pfitzner's *Palestrina* and Mann's own *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, Hauptmann's *Ketzer von Soana* and Saint Dunstan – we can claim that all these subtexts reveal connections with concealed expression, that is with poetry and music, and that their function in *Der Erwählte* sustains the basic idea of the novel: the idea that a cosmopolitan and democratic attitude, a global humanism, manifests itself in a discerning mind, aesthetically linked with explicit statements, that is, clear prose.

### Thomas Mann's Polyphony

I shall end with a theoretical proposition and a brief discussion of the function of music in Thomas Mann's work. The bell-ringing fragment is a euphonious description of cacophonous music, but it itself has a polyphonic structure. I am taking into account the characteristics with which a polyphonic text should comply, even if the concept of 'polyphonic' is used as a metaphor, as is the case when applied to literary texts. Inherent to polyphony is the harmonic simultaneity of independent musical voices. In order to be independent of each other, the profiles of the voices (which may consist of an entire theme or, as in imitative polyphony, only of a motif) must be distinct but of equal importance, and as such they are not subsumed by their harmony. Strictly speaking, the independence of the voices is intrinsic to the concept of harmony, which might be considered as a synthesis of antitheses at a higher level. Analyzing Mann's bell fragment as a polyphonic piece, I consider the subtexts as voices, since, as in musical polyphony, they can act simultaneously without producing an acoustic cacophony.<sup>26</sup>

Interpreting subtexts as voices has yet another advantage. To make this clear, we must assume that acoustical and rhythmical elements are not exclusively musical, as these characteristics are common to music and language. What music does not share with language and especially prose is the concealed meaning of its utterances. Therefore in my opinion concealment may be considered the very essence of music. In prose only subtexts are concealed, namely as non-acoustic allusions. Thus a text with one or more subtexts has an essential resemblance to music. That is what Thomas Mann had in mind when he once mentioned his literary striving for what he called 'musikalische Komplexe von Reizen und Absichten' and pointed to his novels as 'immer gleichsam auf verschiedenen Ebenen spielend'.<sup>27</sup> His work refutes Steven Scher's statement that 'a realization of counterpoint in literature is impossible after all'.<sup>28</sup> From this point of view, the six subtexts at the beginning of *Der Erwählte* can be considered polyphonic voices.

26 See also Werner Wolf, *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality*, Amsterdam-Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999, 21.

27 Mann, 'Ein Wort zuvor: mein Joseph und seine Brüder', in: Mann, *Rede und Antwort*, 99.

28 Scher, *Literatur und Musik*, 13.

They sound simultaneously as long as we hear the bells ring, in other words during the first three paragraphs. The second description of the ringing, later in the novel, confirms this demarcation. There the narrator paraphrases the fragment in three sentences, repeating the first and the last of the initial description. The voices are also more or less independent, as they present equivalent profiles, each with an identity of its own: two psalm texts, a composer from the nineteenth century, a twentieth-century composer, who is also an acquaintance of the author, the author himself, another novelist and a medieval bishop. They harmonize through their shared ethical and aesthetical ideas. All the voices, although they themselves are veiled, throw a negative light on veiling and concealment. They all serve the idea that life and art, both full of delusion, should exemplify an open view of the world and a democratic attitude, expressed in clear prose. The bell-ringing fragment is an example of complex 'metamusic': its most refined musical technique is at the same time the object of critical reflection on music.

Finally we must face two questions. What explains Mann's use of the art of music, not only in his descriptions of music, but everywhere in his fiction, given his critical attitude towards music? And how does he justify this paradox?<sup>29</sup> The answer to the first question lies in the conflict between Mann's aesthetics and his ethics. Convinced that art has to be critical, but that without the musical element it is doomed to be bloodless scholarship, he realized that his own artistic prose also had to be poetic, or musical.

His justification of the paradox, the answer to the second question, is threefold. Firstly, according to Mann, we need not worry about a poetic work as long as the work serves critical, ethical ideas (which is exactly what his work does). Secondly, at many places in his texts he expressed his doubts about the paradox itself. Since semblance or delusion (*Schein*) and death belong to life, he concluded in 1952 that it

... hatte seine Reize und war doch rechtmüßig und falsch, mit dem Gegensatz von Geist und Leben zu spielen ... . Alsob Geist nicht Leben wäre und Kraft des Lebens ...; als ob nicht in ihm das Leben noch einmal stärker, höher, sinnvoller lebte ...!<sup>30</sup>

Artistically this should result in what he calls poetic prose. His final justification is a plea for forgiveness for this paradox, which the narrator gives to the protagonist at the end of *Der Erwählte*. It is

... große Politik, daß Gnade vor Recht gehe; denn sie schafft im Leben das rechte Maß, durch welches der Sünder gerettet ... (242).

(Fortunately after *Der Erwählte* Thomas Mann's remaining life was too short to atone for his 'sin' and write unmusical, bloodless art!<sup>31</sup>). This precept, however, also applies to us, who should forgive the poet or the writer of musical prose. It is expressed by the humanistic narrator of the Faust novel. Speaking about the dubious art of music, he says:

29 In many novels and essays, such as in *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, 'Zu Goethe's Wahlverwandtschaften', 'Goethe's Laufbahn als Schriftsteller', 'Gerhart Hauptmann', 'Deutschland und die Deutschen', 'Zum sechzigsten Geburtstag Ricarda Huchs', 'Rede über Lessing', 'Die Sendung der Musik', 'Für Bruno Walter', 'Pablo Casals' or his notes on 'Geist und Kunst', Mann reflected on these problems.

30 Mann, 'Gerhart Hauptmann', in: Mann, *Leiden und Größe der Meister*, 635, 636.

31 *Der Erwählte* was Mann's last completed novel. *Felix Krull* remained unfinished and *Die Betrogene* is a (musicalized) short story.

Daß ich ihr trotzdem von Herzen zugetan bin, gehört zu jenen Widersprüchen, die, ob man es nun bedauere oder seine Freude daran habe, von der Menschennatur unabtrennbar sind (17).

In other words – again and again Thomas Mann wants us to be tolerant and to forgive, even deadly dangerous liaisons, like incest and the love of poetry or music.